

# Gairloch

## Achtercairn, Gairloch, Highland

Sept 2019



**> 25 affordable homes (19 social rent and 6 low-cost home ownership)**

**> 40,000 visitors per year at GALE**

**Tourist Information Hub, University of the Highlands and Islands centre, shop and café**

**> New Farm and Garden Store**

**> New Air Training Corps purpose built training facility**

**> Local construction firms employed**

**> New opportunities for future expansion**

**> An excellent example of a multi-partner development to attract investment**

**> Wide social, environmental and economic benefits to the area**

Situated in the Wester Ross village of Gairloch sits the development of Achtercairn.

This prominent brownfield site now houses twenty homes which have been delivered in two phases by Albyn Housing Association (eight homes for rent and four low cost homes) and The Highland Council (eight homes for rent).

A local business (the Farm & Garden Store), a social enterprise (Gairloch and Lochewe Action Forum or GALE) and a community organisation (the Air Training Corps) have been incorporated into the development to achieve an attractive village focal point and a place to visit.

To complete the final stage, the Communities Housing Trust (CHT) is building five homes in phase three of affordable housing, and the Air Training Corps have recently built and relocated to a new training facility adjacent to the building which they previously leased.

## Community involvement

The community has been the key driver in the process of developing and improving Achtercairn from the outset. The community themselves established the Achtercairn Development Group (ADG) early in the process, inviting members of the local business association, community groups, neighbouring landowners, the local authority, councillors and Albyn Housing Association, to be involved in regenerating this centrally located brownfield site.

The ADG influenced the masterplan layout: instead of housing at the front of the development, this area now accommodates local businesses including a Tourist Information, which encourages visitors to stop and attracts around 40,000 visitors a year. Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action forum, or GALE, are a social enterprise who successfully opened their sustainable timber building in May 2012 after securing funding from the Big Lottery and other sources.



## Successes

CHT chaired the ADG and consulted with all the stakeholders for their guidance on the preferred direction of the project. This had many benefits: as there was no community company in this instance, CHT were the vehicle used to purchase several sections of land to amalgamate the site; the ADG sought the expertise of others to deliver housing; local businesses attracted funding to their own projects which otherwise may not have been possible if the funding requirements were presented as one package. The community took ownership of many aspects of the development, such as providing street names which acknowledge one of the main local contributors.

The Gairloch Heritage Museum relocated and regenerated a wartime building next to Achtercairn, which is owned by the local authority and currently houses the roads depot. The success of the GALE project has inspired the museum and they have been able to transform this building into another showstopper for Gairloch. GALE are continuing to develop and expand their social enterprise and the Farm & Garden Store are now well established in their new facility. The Air Training Corps has relocated to their new building.

## Challenges

New developments can divide opinions and existing businesses can feel threatened or displaced. While this was a factor in the early stages of the ADG, this was carefully worked through with the community and the partners involved. The ADG steering group was a strength in negotiating through any difficulties which arose and gave everyone a platform to voice any concerns.

## Future

The site provides access to Estate land for possible future housing and potential for a development opposite for a neighbouring landowner.